



*Martin O'Malley, Governor  
Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor  
John R. Griffin, Secretary  
Joseph P. Gill, Deputy Secretary*

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## **Memorandum**

**Date:** July 17, 2012

**To:** Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission

**From:** Tom O'Connell, Director, MD DNR Fisheries Service

**Subject:** State Records and Award Recognition for Sport Fish Catches

### **Background for Sportfishing Award Recognition**

The state of Maryland has maintained a program since the early 1970s that recognizes sport fishermen for catches of memorable-sized fish. This program, previously known as the Maryland Fishing Tournament was designed to recognize anglers, and to encourage and enhance participation in recreational sport fishing in the State of Maryland. Recognition was originally based upon the weight of fish caught by sport anglers; fish meeting a certain weight threshold were eligible to receive certificates, plaques, patches and other awards. The procedure for receiving award recognition originally involved sport anglers taking their eligible catches to participating bait & tackle stores to be weighed. If approved by a recognized award center, paperwork was processed and the angler received his recognition. In 2007, the Maryland Fishing Tournament became a part of the Maryland Fishing Challenge, DNR's annual fishing contest designed to showcase and promote Maryland as a great fishing destination for visitors and residents alike. In 2007, the criteria for receiving award recognition was changed from weight to length measurements. The reason for the change was to make it easier for participating bait and tackle stores, and eliminate the need for certified scales for accurate weight measurements. Additionally, length measurements provided valuable data for fishery managers. Over time, the number of eligible fish species for award recognition has increased dramatically from a few dozen to over 80 species categories encompassing three regions of the State (Freshwater, Chesapeake Bay & Coastal). New species categories have been introduced over time through constituent and Fisheries Service staff requests. There currently is no formal process for adding new species categories.

State record recognition has also been part of Maryland's angler recognition programs. Historically, State record recognition has been offered for all fish species eligible for award certificates. Fish must be visually inspected by a MD DNR biologist and weighed on scale certified by the Weights & Measures Division of the MD Department of Agriculture for state record consideration. Sport anglers are issued commemorative plaques for establishing a State record for an eligible fish species.

The current process for obtaining a State record for an eligible species is as follows:

### *State Records Rules and Procedures*

1. Entries must be submitted within two (2) weeks of the date the catch was made. If the Citation Center you visit does not have a certified scale; it is strongly suggested that every effort is made as soon as possible to obtain an accurate certified weight; since dead fish will lose weight quickly. Local deli meat stores, U.P.S or similar mailing and shipping stores are good locations to look for a scale that is certified by "Weights and Measures". A copy of the certified weight with the scale operators witness signature and date are required.
2. Fish must be a species commonly fished for with rod and reel and caught by legal methods during a legally open season.
3. The fish must be considered "trophy sized." if a new species category is to be opened for recognition.
4. The catch must be weighed on certified scales and inspected in person by a designated biologist from the Department of Natural Resources.\*
5. It is the responsibility of the angler to fill out completely and accurately an entry blank (the Catch & Release Entry Form doubles as the State record form). A side view photograph of the catch must accompany the entry and the actual tackle used must be exhibited to the agent of the citation center if requested.
6. Fish which are caught from pay to fish areas are not eligible for record consideration.
7. Citation centers and anglers should immediately notify the Maryland Recreational Sport Fishing Tournament Manager of a potential State Record fish as soon as possible.

#### **Tournament Office Contact Information**

Tournament Manager: Keith Lockwood

Direct: 410-226-0078 or or 443-569-1381 and ask for Keith

Fax: 410-226-0120

Late day or weekend catches should be immersed in ice water until the tournament office is notified.

8. Positive identification of the species of fish is mandatory for consideration of state record applications. The actual fish must be inspected by a Department of Natural Resources biologist.
9. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources reserves the right to investigate the methods used in catching the fish and the accuracy of measuring and weighing. It also reserves the right to reject any application.

\*Although citations are awarded based on length only, all fish being considered for state records must be weighed. This is because existing records have been maintained by weight.

### **Issues**

#### **Issue #1 - Process for creating new species categories and state records**

When adding new species for award recognition in an upcoming Maryland Fishing Challenge year, DNR will obtain input from MD DNR Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission. Any species added for award recognition would also be considered for state record recognition by default. Thresholds for length (award recognition) and weight (state record status) would be established by DNR Fisheries Service using the best data available for the creation of a benchmark that represents a memorable catch, but is not unattainable by the angler. Benchmarks for award certificate recognitions can be adjusted if necessary.

## **Issue #2 - Fish to be considered for the 2013 Maryland Fishing Challenge awards and state records.**

The following three species have been requested by constituents for inclusion as either a citation award category, state record or both.

### **Redbreast Sunfish**

This sunfish species is native to the Chesapeake Bay drainage. It is already considered for award certificates in the Maryland Fishing Challenge with a minimum size of 9-inches in Freshwater and Chesapeake Bay Divisions. Eight states within its range have state records for redbreast sunfish ranging from 1lb, 11oz to 14oz; we would not invest resources to inspect a first state record until we receive one above 1 lbs.. Several regional biologists felt confident in making the proper identification. MD DNR would like SFAC support for this fish species to be eligible for state record classification.

### **White Catfish**

The white catfish is native to the Chesapeake Bay drainage, and is found in most of the tidal rivers in Maryland. It is commonly caught by recreational fishermen. Sixteen states within its range have state records for white catfish ranging from 22lbs to 5lbs, 11oz; MD DNR would not invest resources to inspect a first state record until we get a report of one above 9 lbs., and a minimum of 20 inches would be set for a Fishing Challenge award certificate. Trained biologists are able to distinguish the white catfish from channel and blue catfish. MD DNR would like SFAC support for this fish species to be eligible for angler award recognition in the Freshwater and Chesapeake Bay Divisions and state record eligibility.

### **Golden Trout**

The golden trout is a genetic color variation of the common rainbow trout, a species that is not native to Maryland, and is hatchery reared only. There has been some discussion from recreational fishermen to consider this fish as a separate state record category. West Virginia and Pennsylvania recognize this trout as a separate state record category other states do not. Maryland inland fisheries biologists agree that goldens should not be considered as a separate state record or award certificate category. The Fisheries Service has an unofficial policy of not stocking record size fish of any species. Yet because waters which are stocked with goldens typically have little to no hold over capacity a new record would have to be stocked at or close to record size. Award Certificate size fish are stocked but even that is problematic due to the issue of fair and equitable distribution across the state. Separating golden trout from rainbows would only compound that problem. MD DNR would like input from SFAC regarding not supporting this fish for eligibility for angler award recognition and state record classification.

## **Issue #3 – Flexibility to Establish State Records for Unanticipated Exemplary Catches**

Despite best planning practices, sport angler catches occasionally arise where exemplary catches occur of both commonly and uncommonly caught fish species, and state record recognition is requested by stakeholders for species that are not recognized. A recent example involved the early July, 2012 catch of a 51 pound Snowy Grouper off Ocean City. When this situation arises, DNR will decide whether to accept the potential new species state record and obtain input from MD DNR Sport Fisheries Advisory Commission when adding the species for award recognition in an upcoming Maryland Fishing Challenge year.